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MATERIAL PREPARED

BY THE

SUBJECTS COMMITTEE

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BY THE SUBJECTS COMMITTEE
BY THE INSTRUCTIONS OF
THE CONTINUATION COMMITTEE.

The propositions presented are not to be considered as in any sense expressions of official judgments or final conclusions, but simply as suggestive of questions which must naturally arise in any thorough consideration of the general subject. — *Minutes of the Continuation Committee, Berne, August* 25, 1926.

Subject I. The Call to Unity.

(Suggested form of Resolution.)

That this Conference desires to call all Christian people to deeper penitence with regard to the disunion of the Churches, and to greater and more definite efforts towards the unity of Christendom.

Conscious that only the deepest motives are adequate to inspire such efforts and to make them effective, it urges all Christian people to remember

(a) the teaching of the New Testament, that the Church should reflect the unity of God ;

(b) the impulse of the Holy Spirit within the Church and in their own hearts which is now moving them towards unity ;

(c) the purpose of the Lord, that through His Church the non-Christian world should be converted, and all human society purified and inspired, a purpose which, especially in view of the strength and violence of the antagonistic forces of our day, can be fulfilled only by a united Church.

Subject II. The Church's Message to the World — the Gospel.

1. The message of the Church to all mankind is the Gospel, promised, prepared for, and foreshadowed in the Old Testament, perfected in the New through the coming of Jesus Christ, and proclaimed to the world through the preaching of His Apostles.

2. In the centre of the Gospel stands Jesus Christ Himself, Son of God and Son of man, who through His life, His death and His resurrection, has redeemed mankind and brought eternal life to light.

3. The Gospel conveys to men, through Jesus Christ and through His teaching, a revelation of God Himself as our Father, and of our duties and hopes as children of God and brothers in His family.

4. The Gospel offers to all mankind forgiveness of sins and eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord ; it is "the power of God to salvation," for our deliverance from evil, and for the transformation of all human life, individual and social, into the fullness of the glory of God.

Subject III. The Nature of the Church.

1. The Society of believers in Jesus Christ is described in the New Testament as the Church of the living God, the Body of Christ, the Temple of God.

2. That God is its builder, Jesus Christ its Head, the Holy Spirit its Life-giver, is the common belief of all Christians.

3. General assent would also be given to the following statement of the Church's purpose : the divine purpose of the Church is to be the agency by which Christ, through the Holy Spirit, reconciles men to God through faith, extends God's sovereignty over their wills, imparts to them His holiness and unites them in love and service.

4. Marked divergences emerge, however, as to the nature of the Church, according as the attention of Christians is focussed upon the visible Church or upon the idea of the Church invisible, and upon the Church of actual experience or upon the ideal community.

5. These divergences affect alike the theory of the Church and the practice of Christian societies. If the question is asked, who are the members of the Church, different answers will be given according as one or other of these conceptions predominates.

6. Can these differences be reconciled? Or, if not, is it possible to find a working basis of agreement which would enable those whom they now divide to share a common life in a reunited Church?

7. The common life of the visible Church must necessarily express itself in outward form. Would it be agreed that, however various in other respects the modes of that expression may be, the following are fundamental and constant elements of the Church's order?

(a) Admission to this visible fellowship is granted through the Sacrament of Baptism.

(b) The life of its members is sustained through the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood, in which they are continually filled anew with the Life of their Lord, and offer to Him their common devotion ;

(c) Its members are enlightened by the Spirit, instructing the heart of each, edifying the whole body through the Word of Scripture and the Word preached, and binding it together by the inheritance of known truth ;

(d) While each member possesses gifts of the Spirit appropriate to his vocation, the public Ministry of Word and Sacramerts is entrusted to those who are definitely designated for this function.

Subject IV. The Church's Common Confession of Faith.

1. Is it requisite to Christian Unity that there should be general agreement in an explicit declaration of the Christian Faith?

2. Is it admitted that among the historic statements of that Faith the creeds commonly called the Apostles' and the Nicene Creed have such weight that with regard to these forms, at least, it is desirable that the Churches should attempt to reach an agreement?

3. Could a united Church agree

(a) To accept the Faith of Christ as taught in Holy Scripture, and handed down in the Apostles' and the Nicene Creeds?

(b) To leave the occasions for the use of these creeds to the decisions of local Churches?

(c) To recognise, while firmly adhering to the substance of these Creeds, that the Holy Spirit, leading the Church into all truth, may enable the Church to express the truths of revelation in other forms according to the needs of future times ?

Subject V. The Church's Ministry.

1. One main element in existing divisions arises from the fact that many of the separated Churches find it impossible to recognise the Ministry of other Churches.

2. Existing forms of Christian Ministry differ both (a) in respect of the functions assigned to the holders of ministerial office in its various grades, and (b) in respect of the mode in which the ministerial commission is conferred. In view of these differences, is it possible to find a way towards a universally recognised Ministry?

3. The most definite cleavage is between those Churches which retain and those which have dispensed with the Episcopate, i. e., with the principle that the Bishop is the normal head of the local community or group of Churches and the normal minister of ordination. Does the Conference agree that the healing of this cleavage is an urgent necessity?

4. It has been suggested, as a result of one series of movements towards Reunion, that owing to its historic position in the Churches of Christendom, the Episcopate in its constitutional form should have a place in the reunited Church, side by side with which the Councils of the Presbyters and the Congregations of the Faithful should

have their constitutional places. Does the Conference regard this proposition as a hopeful solution of the problem with which it deals?

5. If the necessity for a universally recognised Ministry is admitted, are there any other proposals in this direction which ought now to be considered?

Subject VI. The Sacraments.

Would the following propositions be so generally accepted as to form a basis for further discussion ?

1. The part of God and man in the Sacraments. In each sacrament there is an act of God ministered by His Church, and there should also be a response of man. The grace of God is offered to the man through the Sacrament, even if he makes no response, but the benefit of that grace depends on his will and power to use it and on his faith in doing so.

2. The intentions requisite for the due ministration of the Sacraments. The only necessary intentions in the Church, the minister or the recipients, are to do what Christ commanded to be done and to receive what God wills to give through each Sacrament.

3. The Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The administration of the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as instituted by our Lord is of perpetual obligation on the Church.

NOTE. Although important problems arise in connection with other rites to which the name of Sacrament is widely (but not universally) applied, it is not proposed that the attention of the Conference of 1927 shall be invited to those problems.

Subject VII. The Unity of Christendom and the relation thereto of existing Churches.

1. The unity of a body, as St. Paul teaches, implies not uniformity but diversity ; and therefore the Church, which is Christ's Body, should safeguard diversity within its unity.

2. As the Church carries the Gospel to all lands in all times, and thus deserves more and more its ancient appellation, Catholic, it has the more need to provide for diversity, while remaining true to that Gospel which it has received from Jesus Christ through His Apostles.

3. The unity of the Church finds a natural expression in local unity of administration and organisation ; should the endeavour be made to restore in our days the conditions of the days of the Apostles, when each local Church formed a part of the one Church, and it was manifest to all men that in one place there was only one Church?

4. Although certain groups of Christians, feeling a strong concern for special aspects of Christian truth or practice, have under the stress of historical circumstances deemed it necessary to organise themselves as Churches, and have rendered great service to the Universal Church, will it in the future be possible for such groups to remain

within the unity of the one Church, making their special gifts available to the profit of the whole body ?

5. The questions which concern the necessity of a central authority for the whole of Christendom, are of the utmost importance ; but the Conference, while recognising their importance, thinks it inadvisable to include the consideration of them in its programme for these sessions.

Other pamphlets about the World Conference on Faith and Order may be had free from the Secretariat, P. O. Box 226, Boston, Mass., U.S.A.

Please send the names and addresses of any persons who might be interested.

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